Introduction: Why Resolutions Fail

I will lose weight.
I will be neat.
I will be on time.
I will get out of debt.
I will be thin by summer.
I will get ahead at work.
I will be more loving.
I will be assertive.
I will get in shape.
I will get organized.
I will quit smoking.
I won't be defensive.
I will be a better person.

Why is it so hard to keep our resolutions? We begin with enthusiasm and determination, yet our will falters and our resolutions fizzle. And every time we break a resolution—a promise we make ourselves to improve our lives—we feel demoralized, powerless to make progress and realize our goals.

9780670015344_SmallMove_FM_pi-xxxii.indd 13 09/11/13 1:23 AM

Even highly disciplined and successful individuals—*winners*—fail at self-improvement initiatives. We're all losers when it comes to the New Year's resolution, our collective failure rate a spectacular 88 percent. We run in place like hamsters on a wheel, renewing and forsaking the same resolutions in an annual cycle, telling ourselves that if we only had more resolve, more willpower, more *character*, we could force a breakthrough to a better self. We begin each year (or birthday or season or Monday morning) with fresh determination, muster our willpower, tweak our resolutions, and try again. Over time, the pattern of making and breaking resolutions becomes familiar and demoralizing. We go on making resolutions, *but we expect to fail.*

What if instead of failing annually at our New Year's resolutions, we made strategic and targeted resolutions year-round that were guaranteed to succeed and transform us permanently? What if our resolutions brought us immediate rewards, raised our self-awareness, and energized our self-improvement efforts? *What if every time we made a resolution we actually expected to succeed?*

Small Move, Big Change is about making resolutions that succeed every time. By rethinking will power, and refocusing your resolutions, you can master the art of instant and sustainable self-improvement, achieving personal goals that once seemed out of reach. Transparent successes will take the place of mystifying failures, optimism will replace hopelessness, confidence will replace helplessness. You will learn how to succeed instead of fail; indeed, you will learn to *expect* success.

The purpose of this book is to teach you how to translate broad personal goals into *microresolutions* that can be managed, measured, and kept. A microresolution is a compact and powerful commitment designed to nail a precise behavioral target exactly and deliver benefits immediately. Rather than suffering a collapse of

9780670015344_SmallMove_FM_pi-xxxii.indd 14 09/11/13 1:23 AM

willpower after weeks of exhausting effort, you will learn how to overpower your objective through strategic focus and targeted self-control. Your resolutions will pay off the day you start and are sustainable for a lifetime. Microresolutions succeed in every self-improvement category, whether your goal is losing weight, improving a relationship, or saving money.

For most of my life I lived the common experience in resolution making—I failed nearly all the time. These personal failures were a mystery to me, as I was very successful in my career on Wall Street and in nurturing a happy and rewarding family life. I put in long hours running a global department numbering nearly five hundred people, meeting demanding deadlines, and coaching careers; I was devoted to my family, to the needs of my young daughter, husband, and aging parents; I was engaged in charities and active in my community. But despite my capacity to deliver for others and the *take-no-prisoners* attitude I brought to the most challenging career assignments, I struggled to keep the personal commitments I made to myself, from going to the gym regularly to spending more time with my family. With all my energy and determination, I wondered why my resolutions had succeeded only a handful of times.

Finally, after a particularly painful resolution flop, I tried something different. I assigned myself a small but meaningful behavioral change—a *microresolution*—and I succeeded in changing myself immediately and permanently. Yet it was only after succeeding at several more microresolutions modeled on the first that I realized I had stumbled onto a method for making targeted commitments that succeeded virtually every time. I began reaching goals that had been years deferred: I lost weight and got in shape; I became tidier and better organized; I improved my relationships and my finances. Excited by my progress, I began to share my system with business colleagues, friends, and

family who in turn passed the system on to others. My thriving test lab led me to a simple conclusion: *Microresolutions work*.

We live in the age of the small and powerful, where micro computer chips, tablets, iPods, smart phones, and their apps drive productivity at work and at home. Microfinancing is eliminating poverty one family at a time. Nanotechnology is revolutionizing medicine. Critical communications arrive in 140-character tweets, hitting global distribution lists in microseconds. These tools are targeted, designed to fill a specific need exactly and deliver value immediately. So it is with microresolutions—each is designed to hit a specific personal-improvement target exactly and deliver benefits immediately.

Our fast-paced, multitasking days are packed so full that the thought of adding one more to-do, meeting one more need, or pursuing one new personal objective can be overwhelming. Microresolutions slip easily into our crowded lives, quietly working their magic while we go on juggling schedules and meeting endless obligations. Indeed, microresolutions make it possible to achieve continuous self-improvement without breaking a sweat.

Microresolutions are fun and easy and take effect immediately. But before plunging into the mechanics of microresolutions—how and why they work—we should first ask ourselves, why do traditional resolutions so often end in defeat?

Why Resolutions Fail

We all know someone who transformed himself through an act of will—went from flabby to fit, from spendthrift to investor, from slob to house-proud neat freak. At one time or another, nearly all of us succeed in reaching some ambitious personal goal such as running the marathon or finishing a degree. But

9780670015344_SmallMove_FM_pi-xxxii.indd 16 09/11/13 1:23 AM

more familiar are the resolutions we make on New Year's Day and abandon in March, the midnight champagne a distant memory and our forsaken resolutions a lingering and dispiriting hangover. The broken New Year's resolution is a cultural staple, fodder for countless punch lines poking fun at the universal folly of self-improvement. We laugh along, in on the joke, yet the promises we make ourselves are serious, not silly. With so much on the line, why do we fail so often?

We Make the Wrong Resolutions

Google "New Year's resolutions" and you'll turn up dozens of links devoted to popular and worthwhile personal goals. Most of these are what I call *wannabe* resolutions: *I will be fit*, *I will be organized*, *I will be assertive*. These iconic resolutions are very much like wishes in disguise: *I wish I were buff*, *I wish I were on top of my game*, *I wish I weren't such a doormat*. These resolutions focus on *being*, not *doing*.

Years ago in drama class I learned from a master that *to act* means *to do*, not *to be*. Many young actors make the mistake of trying *to be* onstage, playing "I'm angry," "I'm sad," "I'm tough." But impersonating the qualities and emotions of a character—"I'm an angry tough guy with a heart of gold"—leaves these actors little *to do* onstage. In assuming a persona, they miss out on the real action of the drama, the process by which their character grows and becomes emotional. Great actors understand that the secret to behaving and feeling like a character is to focus on what the character *does*. They analyze how the character's explicit actions reveal his objectives, attitudes, and values. They concentrate on playing each action fully, and the sequence of actions adds up to an authentic characterization, a true experience, and an emotional response from

9780670015344_SmallMove_FM_pi-xxxii.indd 17 09/11/13 1:23 AM